

EXCELLENCE FOR ALL
MONTANA INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANT

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project is designed around three major purposes. First, the project is focused on aligning activities and practices within general and special education to create a coherent and unified agenda of school improvement in Montana. The project's title, *Excellence for All*, is designed to communicate this intent. The second purpose of this project is to target specific areas of need unique to the delivery of services to students with disabilities, creating new partnerships, approaches, and solutions to improve outcomes in areas known to be in need of improvement. Third, a sufficient quantity of trained personnel who utilize practices that are known to be associated with successful student outcomes is necessary to ensure quality services for students. This project targets challenges that Montana faces in the areas of personnel preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development.

The primary goals of the grant include:

GOAL 1: STANDARDS-BASED REFORM. Personnel and policy-makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at state and local levels.

GOAL 2: OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. General and special educators, families, and other agencies supporting young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve transition planning for students with disabilities.

GOAL 3: PERSONNEL RETENTION/RECRUITMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

Within the three initiatives of this project, there are specific areas of systems change or improvement that are anticipated. These outcomes represent substantial and significant accomplishments on the road toward improved outcomes for *all* students. In the area of standards-based reform, students with disabilities will be included in the state systems of standards and accountability and will be encompassed within schoolwide improvement initiatives. The creation of a unified management information system will eliminate duplication of information requests across special education, Title I, and vocational education. In regard to outcomes for students with disabilities, interagency collaboration and resource sharing will support transition outcomes, as well as mental health needs. A Low-Incidence Support Team will provide onsite training and consultation. Regional CSPD councils will assist in promoting improved student outcomes through ongoing regionally responsive professional development. In the area of personnel retention/recruitment and professional development, more varied opportunities for specialization and ongoing professional development will be made available to general and special education teachers through the collaborative efforts of the OPI and the state's Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). It is anticipated that increased collaborative cross-state partnerships will reduce personnel needs in related services fields. Interagency collaboration will create options for preservice and professional development for those working within the field of early intervention.

Information regarding SIG projects is enclosed.

Montana State Improvement Grant Office of Special Education Programs Grant Performance Report: Year 2

III. PROJECT STATUS

GOAL 1: STANDARDS-BASED REFORM. Personnel and policy-makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>1.1 Use multiple methods to assist educators in aligning local curricula and instructional practices to state standards, demonstrating their applicability to the learning needs of students with identified disabilities.</p>	<p>Professional development efforts in this area have and are taking a variety of forms to support Montana teachers in their efforts to align their teaching with state standards and to learn how this concept relates to curricula for students with disabilities.</p> <p>First, the <i>We Teach All</i> initiative (described in detail relative to Objective 1.2) has incorporated training on the alignment of local curricula to state standards as part of its support in the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Region IV of the state. Efforts are underway to expand this initiative to CSPD Region II in the upcoming school year. The State Improvement Grant (SIG) funded a full-day professional development session for <i>We Teach All</i> teams at the April 2002 state Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) conference, providing a forum for districts to share their efforts in creating more instructionally responsive classrooms. Further, two speakers were brought in to broaden the base of information available to teams in their efforts to implement action plans developed for their schools.</p> <p>Second, broad-based information dissemination efforts have occurred with more in the planning stages. During the current school year, a Vision Net session on "Standards, Assessments, and Students with Disabilities," providing background about the relevance of standards-based reform to students with disabilities, was delivered by a SIG contractor in a simultaneous video conference/Web broadcast format. This session targeted parents, teachers, and administrators in Montana. This same content, with more detail on curricular alignment and instructional practices, is the basis for an online course that will be offered to teachers in a distance format in the fall.</p> <p>Another professional development series, collaboratively supported by the School Improvement Division of the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and SIG personnel, involved schools in a series of compressed video training sessions focused on the use of data to guide decision-making in the area of school improvement. Interpreting student performance scores and designing instructional experiences to address deficiencies is a part of this series. The data manager supported by the SIG was involved in this effort.</p> <p>Third, written materials, supporting professional development in this area, have been and continue to be developed. The SIG personnel at the University of Montana have developed a chapter on standards-based reform and students with disabilities that will be used to support the online course previously mentioned. Personnel at the University of Montana are writing additional guidance documents that will require internal review and approval by the OPI before they are broadly disseminated.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>1.2 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are being addressed in school improvement initiatives.</p>	<p>The first year of the <i>We Teach All</i> initiative in CSPD Region IV will end in June 2002. Efforts are underway to continue this effort in CSPD Region IV and expand into a second CSPD region of the state. The project is designed to help school district personnel increase their understanding of state standards, align curriculum, and develop instructional strategies that will allow students with diverse learning needs to achieve the standards. Schools were supported in their efforts to assess their school climate and instructional practices, collecting data from all staff to generate a baseline measure during this first year of implementation. Schools will be asked to re-administer the instrument (Learning Climate Inventory) next year to determine what gains have been made in regard to the school culture and practices targeted by the action plan during this school year. <i>We Teach All</i> teams have been encouraged to consider this data, as well as the disaggregated statewide assessment results for their schools, in targeting improvement efforts. There are currently 25 teams in the project consisting of administrators, Title I coordinators, curriculum directors, general educators, and special educators. School teams had opportunities to access consultants and presenters through regional trainings and onsite assistance. The training and assistance impacted over 400 educators and was based on action plans and individual school needs. Included were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action planning related to overall school improvement; • Differentiating assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners; • Interactive writing to move all children forward in the writing process; • Accessing the general curriculum and aligning student Individualized Education Plan (IEP) needs with standards and curriculum; • Differentiated strategies for standards-based classrooms; • Data strategies and using data to improve student achievement; and • Aligning curriculum to state standards. <p>In order to enhance the ongoing nature of the professional development offered through this project, access to consultants via the Internet and telephone was also provided.</p> <p>In addition to this initiative, the OPI evaluation personnel are investigating the various school improvement mechanisms, in which LEAs will be involved, that are either in the planning or implementation stage. The information will be used to identify the specific ways that information about the needs of students with disabilities will be addressed and integrated.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>1.3 Clarify requirements and improve current levels of practice regarding the involvement of students with disabilities in statewide assessments.</p>	<p>The SIG personnel and contractors were actively engaged in this year's statewide assessment efforts. This is the second year of implementing the IDEA requirements that <i>all</i> students be involved in the statewide assessment. Some revisions in the process and in the guidance documents were necessary, and an updated Assessment Handbook was created to communicate new information to schools across the state. The assessment window closed at the end of March, and follow-up efforts regarding interpretation of data will occur when scores are reported back to schools.</p> <p>In relation to the continuing evolution of the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS), the OPI has identified a vendor for the next component of MontCAS, a criterion referenced test aligned with state standards. The SIG contractors and the OPI personnel will determine what supports and training materials will be necessary to ensure this second piece of the assessment system is workable for all students, with alternative assessments available when and if necessary.</p> <p>Another substantial effort will be initiated this summer, when the performance indicators that are part of the state Standards Framework (and also used in the alternate assessment) are reviewed and revised as part of Montana's corrective action plan associated with Title I. Montana must demonstrate the validity of its approach to alternate assessment, and a review and refinement of the indicators will be a necessary first step in this process.</p>
<p>1.4 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to ensure that students with disabilities are involved in statewide assessment systems.</p>	<p>As described above, the statewide assessment period has just ended in Montana. In preparation for the second year of full implementation, the OPI staff conducted a series of training sessions on the changes in the requirements for the involvement of students with disabilities in the statewide assessment program. Statewide sessions were broadcast to sites around the state via METNET, the state's compressed video system. Following the sessions, the OPI staff presented a series of regional training sessions. Printed materials were provided by the OPI and made available to school personnel on the OPI Web site. All information coming out of the OPI is clear in articulating the expectation that <i>all</i> students will participate in the statewide assessment. The only decision to be made by local school personnel is what form participation will take for each student with a disability.</p>
<p>1.5 Establish clear expectations for improved achievement for students with disabilities relative to the general education curriculum.</p>	<p>Disaggregation of data for students with disabilities was completed using assessment data from spring 2001. For the first time, the office was able to publish data on the Web delineating the performance of all students and performance by specific subgroups, including special education, free/reduced lunch, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), gender, and racial/ethnic origin. The results of the 2001 assessment will be used to set achievement goals and chart progress.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>1.6 Develop an integrated management information system that brings together data collected by general education, special education, and vocational education divisions of the Office of Public Instruction.</p>	<p>The new authorization of ESEA (No Child Left Behind) has clarified and increased the requirements for data-driven reporting by school, district, state, and federal agencies, many of which need the same data or the same basic data presented at different levels of aggregation. The OPI has undertaken a project to provide to schools and others as much of the data as already exists at the state level and to assure that figures used by schools in planning are consistent with other reporting, such as Common Core of Data (CCD) and special education monitoring. Although this activity has required marathon sessions of planning and implementation, it is having a large impact on the level of data integration being supported by the SIG.</p> <p>During school year 2001-2002, the OPI staff completed the following tasks, supported by the State Improvement Grant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in planning and acted as facilitator for the third year of Data Strategies training, presented by the OPI. Objectives for 2001-2002 included comparison and analysis of disaggregated data sets, establishing baseline performance, and designing goals and measurable objectives for improving student achievement in attaining mastery of state educational standards. • Designed and implemented a complete database system for analyzing and reporting disaggregated statewide student assessment data, including standard and alternate assessment reports for special education. Results are posted on the OPI's Website as Portable Document Format (PDF) files and Excel spreadsheets and have been used heavily by citizens, schools, the media, grant writers, and researchers for current data on student achievement. • Designed and implemented a data retrieval system and provided data for special education self-assessment use in a new monitoring system. This was a prototype system intended to pull together a wide variety of data for schools to use in setting special education goals and objectives and to provide feedback to the OPI on which data were useful, which were not, and how we might improve the process for the future. • Designed and implemented a data retrieval system and provided data for the Special Education Biennial Report and the Title I Performance Report. The goal of this effort was to establish a single integrated system of data queries to summarize assessment results, school eligibility status, participation rates, and data required by regulations of the two major federal programs. <p>Work in progress for school year 2002-2003:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and implement improvements in the statewide assessment system (MontCAS). Problems that arose during year one of the new testing system are being addressed and measures implemented to avoid or solve them. These include issues of correcting errors in coding by schools that may result in overall scores that are too high or too low, depending on the errors.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 1	YEAR 2 STATUS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state shifted to a school-level and grade-based (in addition to age-based) data collection for the Special Education Child Count of December 2001. These changes will improve the OPI's ability to report statewide assessment participation rates by grade and disaggregation for students with disabilities. • Continue working as a School Improvement Team member to plan integration of the School Report Card, the Five-Year Comprehensive Education Plan, Special Education Self-Assessment, and Data Strategies training. Our objective in this is to create a single system of data extraction and reporting, available to schools through the Web, that will allow download of consistent information for incorporation in their own planning process and in answer to local, state, and federal reporting requirements. • Continue working as a School Improvement Team member to design the next round of Data Strategies workshops for 2002-2003, with a focus on the creation and submission of school Comprehensive Education Plans, making use of the data provided by the OPI and produced by the schools themselves. The Five-Year Comprehensive Education Plan is due in May 2003. • Establish specifications for the creation of longitudinal data tables from the OPI database for easy access. These tables will be placed on the Web for all interested parties, including schools, parents, researchers, and state staff, and will incorporate consistent mnemonic naming, data notes, a data dictionary, and discussions of reliability and appropriate use.
<p>1.7 Link monitoring practices to the school improvement process, supporting LEAs in their efforts to use accountability data to evaluate school performance and identify areas in need of improvement.</p>	<p>The OPI has established a new approach to special education compliance monitoring. It integrates the best aspects of the school improvement model while retaining components that ensure procedural compliance. It significantly strengthens accountability for improvement by statistically tracking the effectiveness of improvement strategies, providing more public involvement, and ensuring ongoing relationships are established for follow-through. The continuous improvement process is dynamic in that it uses a self-assessment procedure that incorporates the elements of data collection, analysis, and interpretation with procedures for verification, development, and implementation of an improvement plan and an ongoing review of the plan's effectiveness. Activities of the SIG include targeted technical assistance, professional development, and assistance in identifying resources that may assist schools in implementing their individual school improvement plans. Monitoring personnel are providing information about professional development needs, identified through the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (CIMP), to regional CSPD councils.</p>

GOAL 2: OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align effort to improve transition planning for students with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 2	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>2.1 Coordinate information dissemination, technical assistance, and training efforts to focus on improved transition planning for students with disabilities.</p>	<p>The Transition Outcomes Project continues to be the major vehicle for disseminating information, training, and technical assistance on improved transition planning for students with disabilities. The project is designed to assist local districts in meeting the secondary transition requirements of the IDEA. It uses a data-driven model that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and evaluates current practices in meeting the transition requirements. • Includes baseline data from student IEPs that serves as the context for setting goals, developing strategies, and implementing a district plan for improvement. • Promotes an IEP process that is driven by student-desired, post-school goals. • Emphasizes improving transition services, showing results, and increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes for students. • Empowers districts to make changes in systems, processes, forms, programs, and approaches. <p>The project has provided training to thousands of school and agency personnel statewide to increase the understanding and implementation of the transition requirements of the IDEA. Baseline data has been collected from approximately 1,400 IEPs across 50 school districts. The data shows school personnel where they are currently functioning related to meeting the transition requirements. Using the data, districts have developed school improvement plans that outline strategies they will implement to achieve their goals. The data collected through the Transition Outcomes Project has assisted the SIG and CSPD personnel in identifying areas of needed training. The SIG provides funding for technical assistance and training to help districts implement their improvement plans.</p> <p>The Montana Center on Disabilities, MSU-Billings, is contracted to assist with training and technical assistance in the area of transition. Staff at the center have hosted workshops and developed technical assistance documents. One such document, <i>Transition Services in the IEP: Guidelines and Examples</i>, is proving to be a valuable resource for helping teachers improve transition services within the IEP. The center has also assisted with strengthening the connection between adult agencies and schools. They have completed and distributed directories that provide information about adult programs and services in two CSPD regions. The directories for the other three CSPD regions will be completed in 2002-2003.</p> <p>New transition IEP forms were recently developed to facilitate a process of long-range planning that is driven by student-desired, post-school goals. The forms, developed in conjunction with school districts involved in the Transition Outcomes Project, have been disseminated statewide.</p> <p>The Transition Outcomes Project is collecting final data to measure improvement in the districts involved in the project. The data shows significant gains in areas such as collaboration with agency personnel, the development of meaningful courses of educational study, and coordination of transition activities among a variety of partners.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 2	YEAR 2 STATUS
	<p>Staff of the Montana Center on Disabilities conducted additional transition-related activities that included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to seven special education classes and one rehabilitation counseling class at MSU-Billings; • Coordinating a statewide workshop to promote student participation in IEP meetings; • Organizing and participating in a regional “Jobs Jamboree”; and • Organizing activities of the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF). <p>The results of a follow-up survey about transition services – a repeat survey of adult service administrators, vocational rehabilitation case managers, mental health case managers, school principals, special education administrators, and special education teachers – was compiled, analyzed, and disseminated as a statewide report. Currently, abbreviated versions of this information are being prepared to highlight key changes in state practices between 1995 and 2000, providing another source of data to guide future improvement initiatives.</p> <p>A final area of activity related to transition and identified in the original grant proposal is the development of a follow-up survey mechanism to document outcomes for students with disabilities after they leave school. We are behind schedule on this activity and will work to develop feasible methodology to implement it in the 2002-2003 school year.</p>
<p>2.2 Support interagency collaboration at the state and local levels to make available necessary services and supports for students with disabilities and their families</p>	<p>The OPI, through the SIG and other efforts, is involved with the many agencies and organizations across Montana that provide some form of service or support to students with disabilities and their families. Resources are limited in Montana, and every existing organization has an important role to play. Duplication of services is not a significant problem in this state. For the purposes of the SIG, subcontracts with universities, cooperatives, the parent training and information center, and regional CSPD councils illustrate the interagency collaboration that characterizes service delivery for students with disabilities in Montana.</p> <p>A Transition Memorandum of Clarification, designed to implement a statewide comprehensive, coordinated service delivery system among state agencies, was recently revised. It outlines the commitment of the system to bring together an array of available resources to students and families preparing for the transition from school to adult life.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 2	YEAR 2 STATUS
	<p>Participants in the agreement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of Public Instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Special Education Division ○ Career, Technical and Adult Education Division • The Department of Public Health and Human Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disability Services Division <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developmental Disabilities Program ▪ Rehabilitative Services and Blind and Low Vision Services ▪ Montana Statewide Independent Living Council ○ Addictive and Mental Disorders Division ○ Senior and Long-Term Care Division • The Montana Center on Disabilities at MSU-Billings <p>As part of the agreement, the Montana Center on Disabilities will maintain a statewide Web site for transition. All agencies involved in the agreement will utilize the site to display their role, resources, and activities related to transition. The centralized Web site will allow persons, schools, and agencies seeking information on transition to go to one site to access multiple sources of information related to transition in Montana.</p>
<p>2.3 Support the replication and refinement of a collaborative model to deliver school-based mental health services to students with emotional support needs.</p>	<p>One of the great areas of need requiring substantial interagency collaboration is the provision of school-based mental health services for students with disabilities. The SIG has a contract with the Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative (BVEC), which has been involved in innovative practices in this area. The BVEC identified the delivery of positive behavior plans, developed by trained personnel possessing effective consultation skills, as key to helping students with emotional disturbances succeed in school. They selected a highly trained, experienced employee to undergo a “Train a Trainer” program on positive behavior interventions. The BVEC coordinated behavior intervention training throughout Region V CSPD and has developed a training program to train trainers in the other CSPD regions. Potential trainers from these regions will be attending an August training sponsored by the BVEC. This training, “The Institute for Applied Behavior Analysis (IABA),” has four integrated seminars that promote positive practices in the field of challenging behavior. The seminars include functional behavioral assessment, positive behavioral support, emergency management, and assuring staff consistency and the provision of quality services. A positive behavior intervention-training curriculum was developed for school-based mental health providers and regular and special education teachers. The curriculum includes behavior analysis, intervention design, reinforcement schedules, and effective consultation. Ten trainings, utilizing this curriculum, were provided to behavior consultants with the BVEC. Two state conference trainings were provided for the 2001-2002 school year. Partnership agreements with school-based day treatment and mental health staff are under development. Additionally, arrangements for training with the parent training center, other Montana mental health agencies, and CSPD are being developed. Parents and agency staff will participate in the IABA training in August. Ongoing activities include continuing coordination for behavior intervention training for school personnel working with school-based mental health staff and recruitment for trainers who will be representative of the state’s geographical regions.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 2	YEAR 2 STATUS
<p>2.4 Investigate the fiscal and programmatic feasibility of a Low-Incidence Support Team to provide onsite technical assistance and training in dealing with the unique needs of students who “stress” the system.</p>	<p>Efforts are underway to put in place distance technologies that would enable technical assistance personnel to work “across the miles” in providing support to students with low-incidence disabilities. Field-testing of video conferencing technologies is in the works for two rural school districts (Darby and Thompson Falls). The University of Montana personnel are testing the viability of using CuSeeMe software, cameras, and microphones to deliver real-time interaction between school sites with T-1 Internet access. Concurrently, information about the technology capabilities of schools across Montana is being compiled to determine which sites could access real-time collaboration tools using this and other Internet-based delivery systems. Additionally, a Web page, containing a variety of support materials that address content frequently arising in providing consultation to teachers serving students with low-incidence disabilities, is under construction. These supports will be implemented and evaluated in at least one region in the upcoming school year.</p>
<p>2.5 Strengthen the infrastructure of the Regional CSPD Councils, supporting them in their efforts to identify and respond to priority professional development needs within their regions.</p>	<p>Personnel from the SIG project are assisting regional CSPD councils in developing a better operational infrastructure that will support continued efforts to meet the professional development needs of personnel in their region. Regional CSPD councils and the OPI Divisions of Special Education and Accreditation sponsored facilitated day-and-a-half collaborative sessions titled, “A Conversation on Creating Regional Professional Development Opportunities.” Invited stakeholders from each region included CSPD regional members, Curriculum Coordinators, Curriculum Cooperative Directors, Tribal Education representatives, Higher Education representatives, Title I personnel, Montana Association of School Superintendents (MASS) representatives, and Montana Education Association (MEA)/Montana Federation of Teachers (MFT) representatives.</p> <p>The goal of these meetings was to begin a conversation about how key education personnel in each region can collaborate on providing the most effective professional development for all education personnel. Outcomes of the meetings included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizing what professional development goals or opportunities could be conducted using multiple stakeholders throughout the region; • Evaluating whether funds from stakeholders may be periodically pooled to provide the best opportunities for professional development; • Providing an increased awareness of the qualities required for well-designed and effective staff development; • Identifying what methods are useful to schools in the region to determine and deliver future professional development activities; and • Determining methods to systematically deliver information and technical assistance from the OPI that will be useful to schools in the region.

GOAL 3: PERSONNEL RETENTION/RECRUITMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 3	YEAR 1 STATUS
<p>3.1 Implement collaborative agreements with personnel preparation programs in other states to alleviate shortages in the areas of related services and educational interpreters.</p>	<p>Existing agreements with Front Range Community College, Colorado, to train seven educational interpreters and with the University of North Dakota, Minot, to train two speech and language pathologists have continued this year. In addition, the University of Wyoming and the University of Northern Colorado are working with Montana to provide online courses for speech pathologists. The SIG personnel have initiated contact with the Occupational Therapy Program at Eastern Washington University (EWU). Six goals for occupational therapist recruitment and retention have been developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the bachelor degrees offered at Montana universities and determine which degrees allow the smoothest articulation to the master's degree program of occupational therapy at EWU. • Provide service stipends to qualified students attending EWU – with a stipulation of serving in rural areas of Montana upon completion of the master's degree program. • Survey school-based occupational therapists about what type of professional development, delivery options, and credit options would work for them. • Using survey results, provide continuing education courses in collaboration with the Montana Occupational Therapy Association in the format that best suits school-based occupational therapists (i.e., summer institutes, graduate credit offerings, etc.). • Pursue distance-learning options for continuing education in collaboration with the Montana Occupational Therapy Association and the higher education departments of occupational therapy. • Create a brochure, targeted at undergraduate students, to inform them about available occupational therapy professional opportunities and graduate programs. <p>As part of the project's evaluation activities, the University of Montana contractors worked in coordination with former Assessment Director Dr. Dori Nielson to repeat a personnel study, "Who Will Teach Montana's Children?" This study was conducted last year to document the extent of personnel shortages in Montana, identify the reasons for these shortages, and develop potential strategies to address them. In this year's survey, distributed in April and May, additional questions were added to gather specific information about needs in the special education area. A separate version of the survey was distributed to cooperative directors and special education directors of large districts in Montana. These surveys focus specifically on issues related to the hiring and retention of related services personnel. During summer 2002, the data will be analyzed and disseminated for use in planning and evaluation in the fall.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 3	YEAR 1 STATUS
<p>3.2 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to increase opportunities for a planned course of graduate study that furthers professional development and lifelong learning for teachers.</p>	<p>Subcontracts have been established with Montana State University (MSU-Billings) and the University of Montana (UMT-Missoula) to develop graduate-level coursework supporting the SIG initiatives underway throughout the state.</p> <p>The Department of Special Education Counseling, Reading, and Early Childhood, MSU-Billings, developed and presented an online course on Differentiated Instruction to general education teachers in the <i>We Teach All</i> project in CSPD Region I. The course was presented in spring semester 2002, and included sixteen students. Student ratings on the course were high. The course was team-taught by MSU-Billings faculty – one special educator, and one general education professor who teaches curriculum courses for general education students. In addition to providing information on differentiated instructional strategies in the classroom to teachers in the field, the course introduced differentiated instruction to the general education faculty at MSU-Billings and demonstrated cooperative teaching online. Materials based on the latest research on curriculum differentiation were provided to faculty at MSU-Billings, UMT-Missoula, and UMT-Western. There was such a favorable response and interest that the course will be offered again. Using SIG funds, the same two professors will teach the course in summer 2002 to any general or special education teachers who wish to enroll.</p> <p>In the fall 2002, the Differentiated Instruction course will be expanded. It will be taught to teachers in the <i>We Teach All</i> project in CSPD Region II. The same special education professor from MSU-Billings will teach the class, along with a different general education professor. The intent is to expand the idea of curriculum differentiation to other general education preservice classes.</p> <p>Preservice faculty in both special education and general education will have opportunities for learning how to use assistive technology (i.e., WYNN Reader, Alpha Smarts, Co-writers), so faculty may integrate the use of assistive technology in their courses. The intent is to provide general education faculty the opportunity to understand the usefulness of accommodations for accessing the general curriculum. Preservice students will have the chance to experience assistive technology first-hand and will be given opportunities to understand its usefulness in classrooms.</p> <p>Pilot testing of the Online Academy modules in the area of positive behavioral supports was conducted by UMT-Missoula faculty in the fall 2001. Permission was received to download this module and use it in the context of a graduate course. Initial results were positive, and expanded use of this and other online modules is planned. The SIG personnel and other educators recently attended a session on the Beta testing of additional online modules developed by the University of Kansas, and Montana will serve as a test site for these activities in the upcoming year. The UMT-Missoula will make server space and instructor support available to make this training accessible in accordance with an action plan developed by SIG personnel and other members of this field-testing team.</p> <p>Finally, development of a distance course platform to deliver a graduate-level course on standards and assessment is underway on the UMT-Missoula campus. Field-testing of technology tools that provide <i>synchronous</i> forms of instruction and delivery are planned for this class. Faculty will work with SIG staff to coordinate tuition support that may be available for teachers interested in taking this course for graduate credit.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 3	YEAR 1 STATUS
<p>3.3 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide new mechanisms and approaches to increase the ability of general educators to respond to the needs of students with disabilities.</p>	<p>As mentioned previously, distance-based delivery of information is essential to ensure statewide access to information about best practices. Montana's invitation to become involved in the Beta testing of the newest online modules from the University of Kansas has created an even broader discussion of the use of other existing online modules to address the issues identified in this project objective. Modules addressing the teaching of reading to students with disabilities, as well as the use of technology to support instruction in the content areas for students with disabilities, are two resources that can address the issue at an informational level. A team has been formed to develop an action plan for the use of these materials. This will require an active commitment and collaboration with an IHE to make materials available to districts in Montana on a for-credit basis. It is anticipated this will be in place in the upcoming school year.</p> <p>At MSU-Billings, general education and special education faculty are working together to integrate curricular adaptations and accommodations for students with special needs into the Introduction to Special Education course and into basic curriculum courses, both of which are required of all education majors in undergraduate preservice programs at all universities in Montana (See objective 3.2).</p>
<p>3.4 Address barriers to the recruitment of special education teachers through changes in certification requirements.</p>	<p>A statewide study on teacher shortages, commissioned by the Certification and Standards Practices Advisory Council (CSPAC) of the Board of Public Education, provided substantial detail about current and projected needs for teachers in Montana. A committee was formed to review the chapter of the Montana Administrative Rules that addresses certification requirements. The state Director of Special Education, state CSPD Council, and the SIG Director have had direct influence and participation with this committee and the Executive Director of CSPAC. Recently, the Board of Public Education adopted a temporary rule that allows anyone with an out-of-state certificate, that has been NCATE or state board approved and has completed a teacher preparation program, to be eligible to receive a Montana teaching certificate. This rule should assist school districts in alleviating some of their personnel shortages. In June 2001, Montana participated in the National Symposium, "Policy and Practice to Ensure High Quality Teachers for Children and Youth with Disabilities." Montana state Alignment Team included the SIG Director, Director of Higher Education, Program Accreditation Specialist, Educational Dean from MSU-Billings, Executive Director of CSPAC, and the CSPAC Council Chairperson. This Alignment Team prepared together an action plan to address certification issues in the state. The action plan continues to be reviewed.</p> <p>Small, remote communities are the most "at risk" in terms of being able to recruit and maintain qualified teachers. Significant progress has been made in the establishment of an employment board and a universal Web-based teacher application form at the OPI Web site. The employment board has 1,000 applications online. Currently, there are 409 job listings with 40 of those listings for special education positions. On average, the Web site receives approximately 30,000 visits a day. The SIG personnel are in the beginning stages of reviewing a proposal from Teacher-Teacher.com and will make a decision on whether or not to participate in this project.</p>

OBJECTIVES FOR GOAL 3	YEAR 1 STATUS
	<p>From an evaluation perspective, the SIG Evaluation Committee will meet in August 2002 to review data collected over an extended period from the OPI Special Education Endorsement Program, coordinated by MSU-Billings. This data will be critical in forming decisions about the continuation and/or modification of this program as one vehicle to address the teacher shortage, particularly for rural communities in the state. The data was presented to the state CSPD Council on April 1, 2002. Currently, there are 64 candidates in the Endorsement Program. We are recruiting at least 25 new candidates to begin a plan of study, beginning in summer 2002.</p>
<p>3.5 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide pre-service training and ongoing professional development for personnel who work within the early intervention system.</p>	<p>The SIG supports a portion of a faculty position at the University of Montana to offer preservice coursework in early intervention. In fall 2001, 11 students completed the sequence of courses in the Rural Family Support Specialist Trainee (RFSST). Students are completing their practicum experiences in the spring or summer 2002.</p> <p>The 11 students in the program enrolled in the following courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Development, Implementation, Evaluation, and Modification • Data-Based Decision-Making • Course Practicum <p>To support the capabilities of the RFSST program, the above courses are offered through distance learning and other nontraditional scheduling and presentation formats. All courses are available via the Internet through the Office of Continuing Education and Summer Program, beginning fall 2001. Seven students have enrolled in one or more off-campus Internet courses.</p> <p>The Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council – The Family Support Specialist Advisory Council (FSSAC) – drafted a letter to the governor regarding the need for increased dollars for training and funding.</p>

EXCELLENCE FOR ALL
MONTANA INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
State Improvement Grant

IV. BUDGET INFORMATION

All funds have been expended for fiscal year July 1, 2000, to June 30, 2001. For fiscal year July 2001 to July 2002, we have expended \$150,457. We will have unexpended funds at the end of this fiscal year. In consultation with our accountant, we have learned that the expenditure rate is increasing as projects and contracts are implemented and all SIG positions are filled. Currently, there are no significant changes to the budget.

V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The activities that have been initiated through the SIG this year have been highly acknowledged from personnel in the field. Positive feedback is being received regarding the *We Teach All* project, particularly from general educators. An unanticipated outcome of the SIG was an overwhelmingly favorable response to a university course on differentiated instructional strategies, offered initially in conjunction with the *We Teach All* project. Since there was such considerable interest in the course it will again be offered using SIG funds in summer 2002 to any general or special education teachers who wish to enroll. There are plans for continued expansion of the course in upcoming semesters. At this time, we do not wish to make changes in the performance objectives and activities.

MONTANA STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANT

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

GRANT PERFORMANCE REPORT: YEAR 2

IDEA – GPRA Performance Measures

Information provided below connects activities of the SIG to GPRA objectives.

PART C GOAL: FAMILY AND CHILD OUTCOMES ARE ENHANCED BY EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES, AND STATE PROVIDES A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

OBJECTIVES
<p>1. All infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families will receive early intervention services in natural environments that meet their individual needs.</p> <p><i>Personnel from the SIG project are collaborating with faculty from institutions of higher education to provide preservice training and ongoing professional development for personnel who work within the early intervention system. Through a subcontract with the University of Montana and a partnership with Developmental Disabilities, preservice coursework is offered in the area of early intervention to support the capabilities of family support specialists and early childhood special educators.</i></p>
<p>2. Child's functional development is enhanced by early intervention services.</p> <p><i>Same as above.</i></p>

PART B GOAL: TO IMPROVE RESULTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES BY ASSISTING STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES TO PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION THAT WILL HELP THEM MEET CHALLENGING STANDARDS AND PREPARE THEM FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDEPENDENT LIVING.

OBJECTIVES
<p>1. All preschool children with disabilities receive services that prepare them to enter school ready to learn.</p> <p><i>The five CSPD Regional Councils in Montana provide ongoing professional development activities for personnel who work with preschool-age children. The CSPD collects impact data following training sessions. Dr. Mary Susan Fishbaugh, Montana State University-Billings, has analyzed the data and the SIG evaluation team will review it for future action. The SIG supports a portion of a faculty position at the University of Montana to offer preservice coursework in the area of early intervention. In the fall 2001, 11 students completed the sequence of courses in the Rural Family Support Specialist Training.</i></p>
<p>2. All children who would typically be identified as being eligible for special education at age 8 or older and who are experiencing early reading or behavioral difficulties receive appropriate services earlier to avoid falling behind their peers.</p> <p><i>The Office of Public Instruction has targeted early reading as a focus area for the upcoming 2002-2003 school year. Through the SIG, the Division of Special Education is collaborating with Title I and targeted schools in the Reading Excellence Grant to promote this initiative.</i></p>
<p>3. All children with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and assessments, with appropriate accommodations, supports, and services, consistent with high standards.</p> <p><i>The major initiative designed to ensure access to general education for children with disabilities is a project titled "We Teach All." The goal of the project is to help school district personnel increase their</i></p>

understanding of state standards, align curriculum, and develop instructional strategies that will allow students with diverse learning needs to achieve the standards. There are currently 25 teams in the project that consist of administrators, Title I coordinators, curriculum directors, general educators, and special educators. Schools are supported in their efforts to assess their school climate and instructional practices, collecting data from all staff to generate a baseline measure during the first year of implementation. Schools will be asked to re-administer the instrument (Learning Climate Inventory) next year to determine what gains have been made in regard to the school culture and practices that were targeted by the action plan during this school year. Schools are encouraged to consider this data, as well as the disaggregated statewide assessment results for their school, in targeting improvement efforts. School teams have access to ongoing professional development opportunities through regional trainings and onsite technical assistance.

The SIG personnel and contractors were actively engaged in the statewide assessment efforts that took place in the Spring 2002. This is the second year of implementing the IDEA requirements that all students be involved in the statewide assessment. Some revisions in the process and in the guidance documents were necessary, and an updated Assessment Handbook was created to communicate new information to schools across the state. The assessment window closed at the end of March, and follow-up efforts regarding interpretation of data will occur when scores are reported back to schools.

In preparation for this second year of full implementation, a series of training sessions were conducted by the OPI staff relative to the changes in the requirements for the involvement of students with disabilities in the statewide assessment program. Statewide sessions were broadcast to sites around the state via METNET, the state's compressed video system. Following the sessions, the OPI staff presented a series of regional training sessions. Printed materials were provided by the OPI and made available to school personnel on the OPI Web site. All information coming out of the OPI is clear in articulating the expectation that all students will participate in the statewide assessment. The only decision to be made by local school personnel is what form participation will take for each student with a disability.

In relation to the continuing evolution of the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS), the OPI has identified a vendor for the next component of MontCAS, a criterion referenced test aligned with state standards. The SIG contractors and the OPI personnel will determine what supports and training materials will be necessary to ensure that this second piece of the assessment system is workable for all students, with alternative assessments available when and if necessary.

4. Secondary school students with disabilities get the support they need to complete high school prepared for postsecondary education or employment.

The Transition Outcomes Project continues to be the major vehicle for disseminating information, training, and technical assistance on improved transition planning for students with disabilities. The project is designed to assist local districts in meeting the secondary transition requirements of the IDEA. It uses a data-driven model that:

- *Identifies and evaluates current practices in meeting the transition requirements.*
- *Includes baseline data from student IEPs that serves as the context for setting goals, developing strategies, and implementing a district plan for improvement.*
- *Promotes an IEP process that is driven by student-desired, post-school goals.*
- *Emphasizes improving transition services, showing results, and increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes for students.*
- *Empowers districts to make changes in systems, processes, forms, programs, and approaches.*

The project has provided training to thousands of school and agency personnel statewide to increase the understanding and implementation of the transition requirements of the IDEA. Baseline data has been collected from approximately 1,400 IEPs across 50 school districts. The data shows school personnel where they are currently functioning related to meeting the transition requirements. Using the data, districts have developed school improvement plans that outline strategies they will implement to achieve their goals. The data collected through the Transition Outcomes Project has assisted the SIG and CSPD personnel in identifying areas of needed training. The SIG provides funding for technical assistance and training to help districts implement their improvement plans.

New transition IEP forms were recently developed to facilitate a process of long-range planning that is driven by

student-desired, post-school goals. The forms, developed in conjunction with school districts involved in the Transition Outcomes Project, have been disseminated statewide.

Final data is currently being collected through the Transition Outcomes Project to measure improvement in the districts involved in the project. The data shows significant gains in areas such as collaboration with agency personnel, the development of meaningful courses of educational study, and coordination of transition activities among a variety of partners.

The results of a follow-up survey about transition services – a repeat survey of adult service administrators, vocational rehabilitation case managers, mental health case managers, school principals, special education administrators, and special education teachers – was compiled, analyzed, and disseminated as a statewide report. Currently, abbreviated versions of this information are being prepared to highlight key changes in state practices between 1995 and 2000, providing another source of data to guide future improvement initiatives.

5. States are addressing their needs for professional development consistent with their Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD).

Personnel from the SIG project are assisting regional CSPD councils in developing a better operational infrastructure that will support continued efforts to meet the professional development needs of personnel in their region. Regional CSPD councils and the OPI Divisions of Special Education and Accreditation sponsored facilitated day-and-a-half collaborative sessions titled, “A Conversation on Creating Regional Professional Development Opportunities.” Invited stakeholders from each region included CSPD regional members, Curriculum Coordinators, Curriculum Cooperative Directors, Tribal Education representatives, Higher Education representatives, Title I personnel, Montana Association of School Superintendents (MASS) representatives, and Montana Education Association (MEA)/Montana Federation of Teachers (MFT) representatives.

The goal of these meetings was to begin a conversation about how key education personnel in each region can collaborate on providing the most effective professional development for all education personnel. Outcomes of the meetings included:

- Prioritizing what professional development goals or opportunities could be conducted using multiple stakeholders throughout the region;*
- Evaluating whether funds from stakeholders may be periodically pooled to provide the best opportunities for professional development;*
- Providing an increased awareness of the qualities required for well-designed and effective staff development;*
- Identifying what methods are useful to schools in the region to determine and deliver future professional development activities; and*
- Determining methods to systematically deliver information and technical assistance from the OPI that will be useful to schools in the region.*

PART D GOAL: TO LINK BEST PRACTICES TO STATES, SCHOOL SYSTEMS, AND FAMILIES TO IMPROVE RESULTS FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

Information on how Part D projects in Montana are responding to these GPRA Performance Measures is not available to us at this time.

OBJECTIVES
1. Programs respond to critical needs of children with disabilities and their families.
2. Projects use high-quality methods and materials.
3. Projects communicate appropriately and products are used to improve results for children with disabilities and their families.
4. Personnel are prepared to serve children with disabilities.
5. Families receive information about services for children with disabilities.